

Each time we come to Mass, we are privileged to receive the Body of Christ. But have you thought about all that means? As for many of us we have been to so many Masses over the years, it might be easy to lose sight of what we receive in Holy Communion. And while there is so much out there on the theology of the Eucharist, I think if I were to explain it to someone I'd describe it in terms of falling in love. God is so in love with us He gave His life for us; something we re-present at each Mass. But as we are reminded of this love and receive it in a special way through Holy Communion, our hearts are opened to becoming better people, and we are changed forever.

As we all know though, we as humans can struggle in the change. We may be on fire for the faith for a time, only to fall again. Or we might become distracted by things of this world and put our energies into the things that pass away. But though it all, God's love is there for us, and in a special way that is found in the Eucharist, which is our constant reminder of how much we are loved by God. And when we open our hearts to Jesus in Communion, we can grow closer to Him and realize how much we are loved.

Odds are you are familiar with the name Alfred Hitchcock. His repertoire included more than 50 films in the suspense genre such as “The Birds,” “Psycho,” “North by Northwest” and others. But what you might not know about him is that his Catholic faith mattered greatly to him, and towards the end of his life, he had a powerful encounter with the Eucharist. But it was also something that one could see in his writing.

The Hitchcocks, Alfred and his wife of 54 years screenwriter Alma Reville, were staunchly Catholic, but they showed irreverence for everything, including Catholicism. Nonetheless, the Hitchcocks had a number of priests in the family; relatives or not, clergymen were in and out of the home, drinking, singing, laughing, and making mischief.

A biographer, Peter Ackroyd recounted a story about how Hitchcock kept his feet firmly planted in reality: he smashed a once-used tea cup every morning after breakfast, to remind himself of the frailty of life. But the Eucharist would remind him of the redemption of life.

Throughout his youth, Hitchcock was immersed in Catholic faith. Raised as a Catholic, he was sent to Salesian College in Battersea, and to the Jesuit

grammar school at St. Ignatius College in Stamford Hill, London. His wife Alma converted to the Catholic faith before their marriage in 1926, and the couple were married in a Catholic ceremony in London's Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, more commonly called Brompton Oratory.

In Hitchcock's later years, he was frequently visited at home by two Jesuit priests, Fr. Tom Sullivan and Fr. Mark Henninger. Father Henninger wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* about how he, as a young priest from Cleveland studying at UCLA, was invited to accompany his friend Fr. Sullivan to the famed director's house.

"On that Saturday," he wrote...when we found Hitchcock asleep in the living room, Tom gently shook him. Hitchcock awoke, looked up and kissed Tom's hand, thanking him.

...After we chatted for a while, we all crossed from the living room through a breezeway to his study, and there, with his wife, Alma, we celebrated a quiet Mass. Across from me were the bound volumes of his movie scripts, "The Birds," "Psycho," "North by Northwest" and others – a great distraction. Hitchcock had been away from the Church for some time, and he answered the responses in Latin the old way. But the most remarkable

sight was that after receiving communion, he silently cried, tears rolling down his huge cheeks.

Tom and I returned a number of times, always on Saturday afternoons, sometimes together, but I remember once going by myself. I'm somewhat tongue-tied around famous people and found it a bit awkward to chitchat with Alfred Hitchcock, but we did, enjoyably, in his living room. At one point he said, "Let's have Mass."

He was 81 years old and had difficulty moving, so I helped him get up and assisted him across the breezeway. As we slowly walked, I felt I had to say something to break the silence, and the best I could come up with was, "Well, Mr. Hitchcock, have you seen any good movies lately?" He paused and said emphatically, "No, I haven't. When I made movies they were about people, not robots. Robots are boring. Come on, let's have Mass."

He died soon after these visits, and his funeral Mass was at Good Shepherd Catholic Church in Beverly Hills.

Hitchcock had a difficult time adjusting to the changes that followed Vatican II, and he once turned down an opportunity to meet personally with the Pope. But while he may have drifted from the active practice of his Catholic

faith in mid-life, Catholicism nonetheless found its way into his stories. Many of his most popular films – such as “I Confess,” “Vertigo,” “Rear Window,” “Strangers on a Train” and others – employ religious imagery and themes.

Reflecting on Hitch's embrace of faith in his later years, Father Henninger wrote:

Some people find these late-in-life returns to religion suspect, a sign of weakness or of one's 'losing it.' But nothing focuses the mind as much as death. There is a long tradition going back to ancient times of *memento mori*, remember death. Why? I suspect that in facing death one may at least see soberly, whether clearly or not, truths missed for years, what is finally worth one's attention.

Weighing one's life with its share of wounds suffered and inflicted in such a perspective, and seeking reconciliation with an experienced and forgiving God, strikes me as profoundly human. Hitchcock's extraordinary reaction to receiving communion was the face of real humanity and religion, far away from headlines ... or today's filmmakers and biographers.

As for why Hitchcock cried silently when receiving Holy Communion, that's something only he and God know. But I suspect it was because he realized something that we all need to realize - namely that God is in love with Him, and was always waiting for Him.

In our first reading, the Wisdom of God is described like a woman preparing a huge banquet. All are invited. "Let whoever is simple turn in here" she says. This is how God works; He creates a banquet for us and invites all, from all walks of life. The person coming to the banquet simply has to have a willingness to come.

We are here at the banquet, and we have come here to be with God. But the Eucharist also needs to impact us in a profound way. It's something we need to think about, and then cause us to change as individuals, as it did in the life of Mr. Hitchcock. So what needs to be done?

First and foremost, an answer to that question would be nothing - simply show up. We do nothing to merit God's grace; it is freely given. Jesus in the Gospel speaks of giving His Body and Blood; something that the crowd can't understand and is rather horrified about, thinking in terms of

cannibalism. What they don't quite get though is that Jesus is not just a spiritual guru or wise teacher, He is God Himself. And His message is I am so in love with you, I will show you how much I love you by giving everything for you, and then giving you my Body in sacramental form through which you may have eternal life. We don't have to beg for this, it is a free gift. God welcomes those who are weekly and daily Mass goers, those who have been far away from the faith and everyone else in between. The banquet is always prepared. This is why even if he had fallen for a time from his faith, Mr. Hitchcock could say "let's have a Mass." Jesus is always waiting for him, as He waits for you and me.

But with that, receiving Holy Communion also requires a response in us too. And there are two important ways to respond.

First, we look at our diet. If we really wish to enjoy the heavenly banquet, we have to avoid the other poor sources of food that never satisfy. We need to eat the banquet God has prepared for us. So much of our lives can be spent going after other food that never satisfies; the food of materialism, wealth, power, popularity and all that. We need to look at our lives and think "where is the junk food?" All of us have things we maybe spend too

much time and energy on; sometimes it can be sinful; other times it can cause us to become more selfish or foolish. Whatever it might be, the virtue of temperance helps us to control those appetites and keep our priority on God and dine lavishly at His banquet.

Finally, the Eucharist changes how we live. Jesus wants us to be so united with him that we may make him present in the world. “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him.” If Jesus abides in us, other people should see that in us. As we hear in the Letter to the Ephesians, “be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and spiritual songs. Sing and play to the Lord in your hearts. Give thanks always and for everything.” So if the Eucharist is taking root in us, how do people see us? Do they see us joyful at Mass or to go to Mass, or do they sense that we do it almost as a burden or to punch a clock? Do they see us with a cheerful, joyful disposition, or as someone who is constantly crabby? Do they see us show kindness towards them and others, tolerance and patience? There are so many people who don’t realize they are invited to the banquet, and aren’t here at Mass. But while they might not see God in Holy Communion, they should be able to see Him in you and me who have received Jesus into our hearts.

What an incredible gift we are about to receive. Alfred Hitchcock received honor in his life and was a household name throughout the world, and he still is as a Hollywood legend. But my sense is if you were to converse with him what meant the most wasn't the awards or the fame. It was the fact that Jesus loved Him, and his emotion at Mass wasn't acting, but authentically coming to the realization that He had been invited to the banquet, even if he had not taken his seat for a while. We too have a seat at the table, so let's take it. As we prepare to celebrate in this banquet prepared for us, may we become what we eat, Jesus, the bread of life.